

...Unexpected...

Message #2//“Unexpected Answer”//John 3:1–13

I want to welcome all you here... I know for those of you watching me right now on video this might be a little unusual... watch a pastor on video... We are one church that meets in 4 locations. 12 services. So wherever you are right now... CMR... WCC... evening campus, right here at Brier Creek, or in our brand new venue, the Bay here at Brier Creek... to all of you, Happy Easter. **Christ is Risen**... we are going to do it, at all of our campuses, all over RDU...

We're in a series called “unexpected”... the idea is that Jesus' encounters with people were almost always unexpected... Jesus had a way of shattering ideas and expectations—he rarely did what he was supposed to do, and he ended up being crucified mostly by the religious people.

Today we're going to talk about an unexpected **answer** Jesus gave to a guy named Nicodemus (John 3).

Now, Nicodemus, as I'm going to try and show you, represents two kinds of people... **The first are people with opinions about God.** Nicodemus has his own ideas about who God is and how God should behave and he doesn't mind sharing them with Jesus, or even telling Jesus that Jesus is wrong in a few areas about God (that's not the rightest thing). **I'd say most of you in here have some definite ideas about God.** I know you're not all Christians... but that doesn't mean you don't have ideas and opinions about God. In fact, some of you are against organized religion precisely because you think organized religion conflicts with what you think God is like.

- I meet people like that all the time... ((I was watching Dateline the other night... debate between a Christian pastor and

Deepak Chopra—who is, as you may know, the spiritual mentor for America's pastor, Oprah... and Deepak kept telling the pastor that he shouldn't teach his view as the only correct one because his idea was primitive and God was bigger than that. Occurred to me... his opinions about God are as strong as the pastor's!

Nicodemus also represents your average religious person... someone who is moral, and good:

- Actually, when it came to religion, Nicodemus was Varsity. He was a what they called a “Pharisee”... Pharisees took morality to a whole new level. The Pharisees had 613 *official* commands... plus a bunch of other fine print, about pretty much everything. For example, Pharisees had a rule... if you ate and forgot to say the **blessing**, they said you had to return to the place where you ate and say it on location... before the food digested. So... 10 hours later you remember... “oh, forgot to say the blessing... truck back to the restaurant...” **How funny that would be today**... excuse me, could y'all move for a minute, we ate breakfast here... and we need to resimulate our meal... waiter, you stand there...” **Pharisees clarified that children** weren't responsible to say the blessing until they could eat something the size of an olive. Once you could eat an olive though... you're on. Totally wouldn't work for my kids... “Allie, want to say the blessing? NO.” You're a pastor's daughter, got to learn to pray...
- Pharisees also had a bunch of religious rituals... little ceremonies you had to go through... if you did them, God was happy with you, and you'd probably go to heaven... Think stuff like “baptism”... in some traditions, “confirmation,”... in the tradition I grew up in you prayed a prayer, shook the preacher's hand, got baptized, etc.

So, people who have opinions about God or people who are religious ritualistic... that's who Nicodemus represents... and in John 3 he has a conversation with Jesus about what God is really like and who is going

to heaven. Jesus gives him an unexpected answer, ⁷'Truly, truly... *
ou must be born again.'

- We're going to talk about what that means because it's probably a phrase you've heard, but it is one of those phrases most people misunderstand... Allie and CAROLINA... "I don't like Carolina; I'm pulling for the princesses." You don't understand...
- For some people, it brings up this idea of an emotional, deeply-cathartic, religious awakening... *Brother Where Art Thou?* Gets caught up in singing... emotional. Rick Langston, CMR stanza... 58th stanza of Just as I am... didn't know what he was doing... everyone saying... "Thank you Jesus." What happened? I don't know, but thank you Jesus..."
- Others think it means converting to some tight moral structure, or even a political platform... and many people, are not really excited about being a part of it... (I found this humbling...) Pollsters say that over 70% of Americans would not want a born again Christian as a neighbor. Ouch... I lower property values? Ned Flanders... Then I found this stat that said half of all Americans claim to be born again... I put that together... that means most born again people don't want themselves as a neighbor!

going to show you that both of those definitions of "born again" are wrong... in some ways, they're the opposite of the true meaning.

But I want you to see that this is *such* an important question... look at what Jesus says, vs. 7 ⁷'Truly, truly... * You must be born again.'

- Before He says it he busts out what we call the double Amen in Hebrew... it's like when your parents said your full name as a kid... When my parents said James David meant I was in deep trouble... Truly, truly, you **MUST** be born again. Must.
- Listen, if Jesus has any validity to you whatsoever... you think he's great man, wise teacher, Son of God, misunderstood rebel... whatever, you should pay attention. Because He says in unequivocal, crystal clear terms, you **MUST** be born again.

- That means that if you're not born again, then you're staking your entire hope of eternity on the fact that Jesus was wrong here. And if you're ok with that then fine... but you should know what you are doing.
- Jesus said that unless you are born again you'll never see the kingdom of God.
- I'm going to tell you, I believe that when you understand what it means you'll see that MILLIONS of people in the church are not born again and will never be found in heaven.

^{3:1} Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. Two things you should hear in that... religion and success. **Pharisee**: that's religion and Ruler of the Jews: success. This guy's got as he sees it, the approval of God and the approval of others... he is the best of the best. ² This man came to Jesus by night...

- What's the significance of him coming at night?
- Some people say he was **ashamed**...; others say... he just knew that Jesus was a **busy during the day**... I don't know if any of those things are true... But I do know this... **night in the Gospel of John** usually represents a kind of spiritual darkness¹... Nicodemus had a face he put on in the day... really successful, had it all together... but at night, he knew something wasn't quite right. For all his religion and all his success, something was missing.
- Some of you are like that... you have a face you wear in the day... success, religiously ok. But deep down... you know something is not right, not settled, not satisfied.

And said to him... "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." We, who is we? All his big important friends... ³ Jesus answered

¹ "Night is also likely a theological symbol that expresses Nicodemus' spiritual relation to the truth. John often refers to darkness as the realm of evil, untruth and unbelief. The only other figure who appears at night is Judas Iscariot, who departs into the night to betray Jesus." D. A. Carson, *Commentary on John*. See also John 1:3; John 3:18.

him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- Interesting the response... He cuts him off... "Doesn't say... Wow, hey man, thanks for your support... Means a lot coming from you... Instead, He's like, cut the political posturing... I'm not really impressed with your religion, your success or the fact that all the important, smart people agree with you.

Nicodemus responds, (⁴ Nicodemus said to him,) "But how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

- Nicodemus is like, "What?" I mean, He thinks Jesus' cheese has totally fallen off His cracker. He's like, You mean that to get to heaven I have to climb back into my mom... first of all, that's gross... second of all, she worked so hard to get me out; I'm 50 now... plus I feel like there's **all kinds** of psychological issues with that...

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

- I'm talking about a different kind of birth...
- And Jesus goes on to explain what He means... Nicodemus finally says to Him...

⁹ Nicodemus said to him,) "How can these things be?"... Then, see, Jesus busts out the "double Amen" again... ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we (real quick, little Jesus' sarcasm here... who is "we" now? remember Nicodemus had said "we" (me and all my important friends) think you are teacher come from God... Jesus is like, "Well, we... that is, me and the Holy Spirit and God the Father... here's what we think, just saying... (we) speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

OK, in this passage, there are 3 dimensions of being born again that Jesus covers... then ask you a question... have you been born again as Jesus describes it?

I. You must be born again to a new source of authority in what you think about God (v 13)

- Nicodemus has objections with what Jesus teaches... being born again doesn't make sense. It seems impossible; the whole concept is offensive... But Jesus says, "Look, you need to decide who gets to determine what is true... Are you in a place to contradict what I tell you about these things?"
- See vs. 13? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. He's saying... You've never ascended to heaven and seen ultimate truth from God's perspective... your opinions about God, no matter how lofty or intelligent, or if you have more degrees than a thermometer, they're just opinions. You don't speak from authority or experience... Me, on the other hand, I came down from heaven, I speak of what I do know.
- **Here's an analogy I use a lot... "Descending from heaven" Can you contradict? No. Believe?** Not necessarily.
- That's what Jesus is doing with Nicodemus. You're not in a place to contradict. You need to decide if I am who I say I am.
 - You see, Nicodemus is like an American (more so than maybe anyone else in the Bible but Doubting Thomas...) "We know you are a teacher come from God." In other words, *We know that you are a great man, one of the greatest influences on Western thought, but we are not sure about all this other stuff you are teaching.* Some of it seems offensive to us, unrealistic, unscientific...
 - That's what many of us do to Jesus. Maybe it's not being born again that is the difficulty for you... but maybe the whole problem of miracles! Maybe you object to what the Bible teaches about various aspects of morality... you feel like it is outdated. Or you have a

problem when it says the only way to be saved is through Jesus...

- I have opinions about God... just like you ... at times I have thought, "If I were God, I'd let all **good, sincere people** go to heaven. Or, I don't think there should be a **permanent hell**. If I were God, **good people would never suffer** on earth. If I were God, everyone who **tithed** would never lose their job. If I were God, then if you're a **good parent your kids** automatically grow up to be successful and love you... I've thought, God, I'm going to be a good parent and I'm counting on my girls marrying doctors and living next door. I think **God should be intensely interested** in my girls' swim meets because their little sense of self-esteem is on the line, and He should make them win every times. (Some of you are like, "My daughter's competed against yours." I don't care.) But sometimes God doesn't do what I think He should do... and I have to *decide whether or not I get to define God or if God gets to define Himself*. (Don't think it is different for me... I might be a pastor but I'm just like you.)
- Christian faith is... Believing that Jesus is who He says He is, and thus believing what He says, even when it contradicts what you think. **Here's the question... Is Jesus who He says He is?** And, if so, will you submit to what He says about God? At Easter, we celebrate the Resurrection... if it's true, it changes everything. **Adam...**
- I know you are smart people... more PhD's here than anywhere... and many of you have ascended high into your knowledge... but do you really think you can know it all? Can you really correct Jesus?
- When I graduated from college, I thought I knew it all... Now, I think I'm an idiot... Idiot. 5 years from now... chances are you'll look back and think you were an idiot again. If you could see from ultimate knowledge... would you think you were that smart? If Jesus is who He says He is... then our knowledge,

compared to His, has to be rather small.... That's the question then, for Nic and for us,... Is Jesus who He says He is?

*Second, **II. You must be born again to a new foundation of righteousness (v. 6)***

- As I explained, a lot of people think born again means to switch to adopt a tight, prudish moral code... Get religious, start voting Republican, and wear denim jumpers. But look... Nicodemus is impeccable... He is already super morally strict! He's "righteous," successful, praised by everybody, homeschools his kids.
- Jesus says, "That's not good enough." (v. 6) "That which is born of (sinful) flesh is (still sinful) flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Confusing... You won't get to heaven by a gradual improvement and disciplining of your sinful flesh. You need a **new birth** of righteousness... a whole new basis for righteous standing before God...
- Salvation, as Jesus explains it, is not becoming morally better; it is having a whole new **basis** of right standing before God... something that doesn't come from you, something given to you as a gift. The way Jesus saved us that He lived the life we were supposed to live, and then died the death we were condemned to die, in our place, so that what He did can be credited to our account, as a gift. **Imagine a guy graduating from Duke working for Apple computers...** College loans... Duke is like 240K a year or something like that... owes enormous... so every little pay period you set aside a little... But what if Steve Jobs credited to me his bank account. What if he said, "My bank account is his now." All the sudden, I have money to spare. We owed a debt we could never pay back; Jesus paid a debt He didn't owe, and then gave it to us as a gift, if we would accept it.
- There are two ways of seeing Jesus: Teacher, the other is Savior:
 - Nicodemus saw Jesus as a teacher... Jesus, "teach me" what I must do to save myself. Give me the missing

ingredient. Help me put some more money in my account...

- The other is Savior. That is, Jesus is not primarily a teacher who teaches me what I must do to get to heaven, but a Savior who did for us what we could not do for ourselves and offers to give it to us as a gift.
- To receive it, we have to die to our own basis of righteousness and be born again to a brand new one.
- Rich, successful people like Nicodemus don't want to hear this because they have spent their whole lives working to become something that exalts them above other people and makes them better and more worthy than others before God. But Jesus says, "That doesn't impress me at all!" **Isaiah 64 says... all our righteousness is like a filthy rag...***Bloody tampon. That's offensive, disgusting. That's exactly why Isaiah said it. You go before God and say, "**I lived a pretty good life, I'm better than others...**" **You lay a stained, filthy menstrual rag at Jesus' feet!** You must be born again... not as an "improvement" of your stained, sinful flesh, but a new birth in the Spirit! If you have any hope of getting to heaven, it will only be because you're born again...
- How about this... businessman: **Do you tell yourself that because you've been successful in life, made a lot of money, that chances are, you'll be fine with whatever awaits you in the afterlife? I'm fine now... I'll be ok. I've always made it.** NO. You MUST be born again. Without it you'll never make it to heaven. Your road at the end of your life stops and goes to hell.

hardly, you must be... **III. You must be born again by new life within vs. 8)**

- In vs. 6 he said it was a spiritual birth... Vs. 8 gives a very powerful analogy about it. **⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.**" (Used to justify all kinds of erratic behavior) The

Spirit, He says, is like the wind... It's not from inside you, you can't work it up; you can't control it. It's a power outside of you that blows new life into you.

- Nicodemus looks at Jesus like a teacher who will help him improve his existing life. Jesus is talking about the power of a whole new creation that comes from encountering the Spirit, from knowing God.
- In all of Nicodemus religion, he forgot the most basic thing... that is, knowing God! That's what was missing, that's why he felt like, even with all his religion and success... he was "in the nighttime!"
- In talking about the wind, Jesus is alluding to a passage in **Ezekiel 36: Elisha** saw a vision of a valley of old, dead dry bones... preach to them... the Spirit of God blew across them... they became alive again.
- For some you, those dry bones is what you feel like... You're successful, something's missing. Been through rituals. But something is not right! That's because you have never been born again... you are separated from God... Bones of defeat... You don't need a teacher standing over you, condemning you telling you to how to improve, you need a Savior who can wash you in His blood, fill you with His Spirit and let His power surge in you!

Question I've been building to: Have you been born again?

- **I'm not calling you to an emotional experience** (No evidence Nicodemus is emotional here or that Jesus is playing on his emotions... disciples are not in the background humming "Just as I am...").
- **I'm not talking about going through another ritual...** I'm not saying, "Hey, this morning, pray this prayer... check this box..." We got all kinds of people who have done that. Nicodemus had been through plenty of thousands of new rituals. You must be born again... not a new morality, but a new birth...
- **I'm not asking if you've gotten religion or come to church a fair amount**

- Going to church doesn't make you a Christian more than going to McDonald's makes you a hamburger, going to Starbucks makes you a \$9 coffee or going to Dunkin Donuts makes you a cop. You must be born again...
- ***I'm not asking you if you believe in God***
 - Demons believe! They know He existed, even tremble with fear... they respect Him.

'm asking you... Have you been born again?

- Have you acknowledged Jesus as the authority both of what you think and how you live? Have you surrendered your opinions to His? **I was once sharing Christ with a Muslim girl...** Would you change if you knew? Why would God reveal to you if you have your mind made up on what he can or can't be?
- Have you given up all hopes of being good enough to get to God and put all your trust in what Jesus has done for you?
- Is Jesus alive and at work in your soul?

am afraid a lot of you have religion... **Brad:** "In this new circle of friends, they kept talking a lot about Jesus, I only knew church." A lot of you believe, it's like the demons believe... "Yes, Jesus exists" but he's not Lord of your life. I've always heard that for many people heaven and hell are separated by 18 inches

you MUST be born again. You CAN be, right now...

Just a minute, I'm going to have you bow your heads and pray... if faith is at work in your heart, you can respond to Christ... Let me give you a way to express it: "Jesus, I surrender, Jesus, I believe!"

ullpen:

- Have you born again by God, to a new authority, a new basis for righteousness, and a new life in the Spirit of God?
- **guy** in the day, and could probably catch him late at night... so he just shows up at his pad at night and asks if they can chat... by the way, not allowed to do that with me... don't show up at my house at night. "Well, Jesus did it." Seriously, Jesus didn't have kids... so, leave it alone...))
- Do you know Jesus as your final authority, the foundation of your hope to get into heaven, and the one who lives in you changing you?
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- So... that's the question...Jesus is no good to us just as a teacher... If, like Nicodemus, you operate in "Jesus as teacher" mode, you can bend yourself to be a good person, but you don't deal with the source of your sin. But if you operate from "**Jesus as savior**" mode, you deal with the problem deep within... the source of your sin, the place in your soul where you don't know God...
- No less dramatic or impossible
- **And let me just point out again, that if Jesus is who He says He is, then if you are not born again, you have no chance, no matter how good or worthy you think you are, of going to heaven.** That's one of the most popular assumptions in our culture, and Jesus says it is patently untrue? (see why he got crucified?)
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- But you have to decide, just like Nicodemus, who gets to make the rules. If Jesus really is the Son of God, come down from heaven, then your opinions about God don't really matter that much, right?
 - Not asking if you've gone to church...
 - Going to church don't make you a Christian more than going to McDonald's makes you a hamburger,

going to Starbucks makes you a \$9 coffee or going to Dunkin Donuts makes you a cop

- Not asking if you've done a ritual...
 - Rick: "they kept saying 'thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus' and so I said it... like that scene in George Clooney movies..."
 - Brad, "In this new circle of friends, they kept talking a lot about Jesus, I only knew church."
 - Many of you are not...
- Not asking if you "believe in God"
 - Demons believe!
 - I've always heard that for many people heaven and hell are separated by 18 inches

⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

- People with religious righteousness... this sounds radical... this is a powerful analogy...
 - Being born again is a challenge to moral structure. He is coming to the most impeccably moral person and telling him he must be born again.

Now, let me talk about Nicodemus for a minute... represents two people...

- People with opinions about God... he has some theories, and Jesus is going to confront him (some of you may have checked out... I don't really believe what Jesus says)... all of you have opinions about God.
- Religious... thinks he is ok... Pharisee... rituals: you are in, you are out. We have rituals. Baptism; praying a prayer;

Religious righteousness...

- Jesus is not impressed...
- New person... Ezekiel 36: dry bones

- New foundation of righteousness

Have you surrendered to Him as an authority, are you trusting in Him alone to get you to heaven, and do you show the fruit of His life working inside of you?

Research:

- Pharisee. Pharisees were people who had a very clear system of morality... what was right and wrong. They were big into rituals... rites of passage and ceremonies RESEARCH
- Pollsters say that 70-80% of Americans would not want a born again Christian as a neighbor
- John 3:11–13... how does it fit?
- Any significance of “night”?